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ABSTRACT

Most educators have not studied the research evidence regarding creativity and know little about the personality characteristics of creative people. Research has shown, for example, that creative people are aesthetically sensitive, imaginative, and flexible. They are also self-reliant individualistic, independent, and perceptive, and have a profound commitment to the meaning of their work. One study of creativity emphasizes the characteristics of divergent thinking, or the ability to produce a succession of ideas to meet a particular need. Another study cites observable signs of creative behavior in the classroom, including challenging the ideas of authorities, manifesting curiosity, and finding relationships among apparently unrelated ideas. Still other studies characterize the creative person as being more concerned with meanings and implications than with facts and small details. Reading teachers might consider their own behavior and the behavior of their students from the creative perspective, as creative students frequently reject techniques of reading instruction as incompatible with their unique creative needs. (HTH)

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Creativity and the Reading Specialist: Some Observations From Research Data

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Creativity and the Reading Specialist: Some Observations From Research Data

The term creativity is frequently used by educators to identify behavior that is different or novel when compared to conventional modes of conduct. This creative behavior usually is the ability to be imaginative and original in handling words, ideas, and materials. For reading specialists, an understanding of creative behavior may provide insight into certain reading problems.

Reading is an active, self-directed process controlled by the reader in many ways and for many purposes. It is possible that some creative students are mistakenly classified as having a severe learning or reading problem. Their creative behavior might be interpreted as a disabling handicap. There is a tendency to equate divergence with abnormality. Once this is done, it may be difficult to succeed with applied clinical treatments (i.e., a reading clinic).

There is more than one process of reading (Gibson and Levin, 1975) and most educators understand this guiding principle. Reading specialists are frequently challenged to find the right combination of teaching strategies to stimulate an individual reading style. It may be a creative task for teachers to find the magic key that unlocks reading potential for their pernicious students.

Creativity is often misunderstood as being a type of behavior associated solely with scholastically bright, high achievers. David Ausubel (1968) said creativity is one of the vaguest, most ambiguous, and most confused term in psychology and education. He also said "teaching for creativity" is a flourishing fad and a catchphrase. Most educators have not studied the research evidence regarding creativity and know little about the personality characteristics of creative people.

Creative artists, writers, mathematicians, architects, and scientists differ from those less creative soles in the following ways:

1. Greater Aesthetic Sensitivity. The more creative persons place a high value on aesthetic experiences and responses.
2. Imaginative. Creative persons have more inaginative, new different, novel ideas, both in quality and quantity.
3. Flexible. The creatives have more ability to shift and to adapt, to deal with the new, the unexpected, and the unforeseen.
4. More Self-reliant, Individualistic, and Independent. Creative persons value their own independence and autonomy.
5. More Perceptive. Creatives show a preference for perceiving, a preference which leaves

them more open to internal and external experience and allows for flexibility and spontaneity.

6. Commitment to Their Work. Creatives have a profound commitment to the meaning of their work (Zahn, 1966).

Detailed studies of creativity have been accomplished by respected scholars such as: Ellis Paul Torrance, Donald W. MacKinnon, Sarnoff A. Mednick, Paul Heist, Philip Wesley Jackson, and Joy Paul Guilford. Some of their findings will be presented and briefly reviewed in an attempt to define and explain the creative personality.

In 1950, J. P. Guilford made a presidential address on "Creativity" to the American Psychological Association. This address stimulated interest in creativity, and during the late 1950s and early 1960s research on creativity for education began to appear in print. "Almost without exception, the conclusions seemed to be that those with creative potential are neglected, if not discriminated against, at all levels of American education" (MacKinnon, 1968, p. 149). For Professor Guilford, divergent thinking is one of the most important ingredients of creativity (Guilford, 1957 and 1959). Three significant characteristics of divergent thinking are flexibility, originality and fluency; or the ability to produce rapidly a succession of ideas that meet some requirements (Arieti, 1976).

E. Paul Torrance has been involved in the study of creativity for the past 25 years - its nature, measurement, and training. Torrance has concluded that many kinds of talent, including creative talent, exist in most populations at any given time. As a contribution to education, Torrance has attempted to help teachers identify and promote creativity in the classroom. Some observable signs of creative behavior in the classroom, according to Torrance, are:

- Intense absorption in listening, observing, doing.
- Intense animation and physical involvement.
- Challenging ideas of authorities.
- Checking many sources of information.
- Taking a close look at things.
- Eagerly telling others about one's discoveries.
- Continuing a creative activity after the scheduled time for quitting.
- Showing relationships among apparently unrelated ideas.
- Following through on ideas set in motion.
- Manifesting curiosity, wanting to know, digging deeper.
- Guessing or predicting outcomes and then testing them.

- Honestly and intensely searching for the truth.
- Resisting distractions.
- Losing awareness of time.
- Penetrating observations and questions.
- Seeking alternatives and exploring new possibilities (Torrance, 1971).

Torrance (1960) found a weak relationship between creative thinking and generalized ability as measured by intelligence tests (Getzels and Jackson, 1962, also found this weak relationship). Certain childlike (usually called childish) mental operations are demonstrably essential to creativity, among them playfulness, wishfulness, spontaneity, approximation, and free-floating openness of mind. In summarizing some of his research, Torrance said the most exciting insight was that different kinds of students learn best when given opportunities to learn in ways best suited to their motivations and abilities. "Whenever teachers change their ways of teaching in significant ways, a different group of learners become the stars or 'high achievers'" (Torrance, 1967, p. 88).

Donald W. MacKinnon, while conducting research at the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research within the University of California at Berkeley, has identified the creative person as: relatively uninterested in small details, or in facts for their own sake, and more concerned with their meanings and implications, possessed of considerable cognitive

flexibility, verbally skillful, interested in communicating with others and accurate in so doing, intellectually curious, and relatively disinterested in policing either their own impulses and images or those of others (MacKinnon, 1967). MacKinnon also said one of the most salient characteristics of the creative person is his courage. "Since the creative person is not preoccupied with the impression he makes on others, and is not overly concerned with their opinion of him, he is freer than most to be himself" (MacKinnon, 1967, p. 27).

In 1960, MacKinnon had published an article titled, "The Highly Effective Individual," and he conceived of two variables from numerous sources as being central and determinative of the highly effective individual:

1. Emotional stability or personal soundness.
2. Creativity of thought and action.

MacKinnon also found that creative people not only experience more anxiety, they also have stronger egos and have a perceptual preference for the complex and asymmetrical; they prefer the richness of the disordered to the stark barrenness of the simple and show a preference for intuition. "In all the groups we have studied we have found that self-image and ego-ideal are of crucial importance in determining the level of creativeness with which a person lives his life and practices his profession..." (MacKinnon, 1967, p. 24).

In regard to education, MacKinnon said, "The concept of educating for creativity necessitates our thinking of it not as a fixed trait of personality but as something that changes over time, waxing and waning, being facilitated by some life circumstances and situations and inhibited by others" (MacKinnon, 1968, p. 150). Reading professionals are most certainly interested in promoting those circumstances that are related to constructive, supportive approaches. Often it is a creative challenge for teachers to find the best approach for each student.

Paul Heist (1967 and 1968) has identified the creative pesson as: independent, innovative, flexible, with a highly developed sense of the theoretical and the esthetic, and exercising discipline only when he considers it necessary. Philip Wesley Jackson and Samual Messick (1967) found at the level of everyday experience that creative expression of the highest quality tends to come from people who limit their efforts to a single mode of expression. The professional writer, researcher, singer, actor, and educator (reading specialist) might be good examples.

Sarnoff A. Mednick (1962) introduces the concept of usefulness within the dimension of creativity, and this is most important for educators and students. Mednick maintains that the answer 7,363,474 to the question, "How much is 12 and 12?" is original but not creative, because it is not useful within accepted mathematical conventions.

Nevitt Sanford studied the research accomplished by MacKinnon that indicates most creative people are distinguished from less creative ones by greater flexibility of thinking, breath of perspective, openness to experience, freedom of impulse, breadth of interest, autonomy, and integrity. "The argument from this is that, in general, the creative person is above all a highly-developed person, and that educational programs can have an effect on such development in college" (Sanford, 1967, p. 204). In the late 1950s Sanford was touring Eastern Europe, and he said, "When in Russia I suggested to various Soviet professionals and officials that as the living standard in their country rose, and as long as the heavy emphasis on education continued, young people would be increasingly disaffected and deviant. (And, of course, creative, though I didn't mention this.)" (Sanford, 1968, p. 188-89).

But how can creativity flourish? In 1927 Joseph Wallas provided an early description of four main steps in the creative process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. These primary steps have been expanded in various ways. A popular modification of this process developed by Alex F. Osburn in 1939 is what he called brainstorming (Osburn, 1957). Silvano Arieti (1976) a practicing psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, provides a good summary of the major theories of creativity development along with other insights, some quite complex, in his book, Creativity: The Magic Synthesis.

Jack A. Chambers completed a study for the National Center for Educational Research and Development in 1972 titled "College Teachers: Their Effects on Creativity of Students." Chambers indicated: introversion, dominance, and self-sufficiency as being associated with creativity for teachers and researchers. He said there are clear-cut behavioral patterns that differentiate teachers who facilitate creative development from those who hinder it. According to Chambers' research, encouragement through individual contact is found to be the most important aspect of student-teacher relationships affecting creativity. In his study of gifted adolescents, Ernst Kris said he had never seen a case of artistic talent that had not begun by identifying with an older person (Loomie et al., 1958).

Creativity seems to be enhanced by a climate of indulgence, safety, friendliness, and cooperation (Dentler, 1964). Robert Nisbet (1975) warns that we may be losing our creative drives by not encouraging these creative climates. A considerable number of research studies on creativity have been devoted to specific teaching strategies for developing fluency, originality and flexibility (Freeman et al., 1971).

Creative students may find it most difficult to conform within institutional settings. "...there are indications that high creativity may be associated with unusual degrees of introversion and with certain kinds of high anxiety, as well as with flexibilities of imagination that are quite disabling

in regard to high efficiency and freedom from oscillation in routine performances" (Cattell and Butcher, 1968, p. 272).

Creatives tend to make deviant scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory; this is reflective of the complexity of personality, candor, lack of defensiveness, and openness to experience and not a genuine personality distortion (Ausubel, 1968). "Unconventional people are likely to give unconventional responses to diagnostic test items and thus obtain scores indicating the presence of psychopathology" (Bereiter and Freedman, 1962, p. 577). It has been found that creative professionals (scientists, architects, and novelists) were prone to give unusual responses to word association tests and that unusualness of mental association was one of the best indices of an individual's originality in professional work (Hudson, 1966).

The close relationship between mental illness and creativity has been well documented (George Pickering's Creative Malady, 1974, is a good example). VanGogh, at the height of his career, cut off his ear, then committed suicide; he was a schizophrenic. It has been said that the artist threads his way between the Scylla of routine and the Charybdis of insanity (Skura, 1980). Creativity and insanity have been linked to the ability to perceive reality differently.

Many who achieve distinction are hypomanics with mood swings from one of energy, exuberance and confidence, to one of the reverse. "Freud was an example. Such people are quite

sane, and, as long as circumstances do not press too hard, are in no danger and often achieve great things....Plato thought there were two forms of delirium - insanity and inspiration." (Pickering, 1974, p. 26 and 285).

The identification and study of talented students accomplished by Wallach and Wing (1968) gives emphasis to self-initiated activities. "As soon as one looks outside the classroom for evidence of talented accomplishments or attainments, rather than simply looking within the classroom at academic achievement, one finds the student's general intelligence status singularly unrevealing as to who is more likely to exhibit the superior performances. Instead, the clues are provided by information about the ideational resources of the person - something quite different from intelligence" (Wallach and Wing, 1969, p. 127). There seems to be compelling evidence for predicting future creative behavior from past creative behavior (Holland and Nichols, 1964; Richards, Holland and Lutz, 1967; Hocevar, 1979).

Reading teachers might consider their own behavior and the behavior of their students from the creative perspective. Knowing when and how to administer professional knowledge is part of an effective creative task. Some research indicates socially and emotionally maladjusted students often have higher creative potential than socially and emotionally adjusted students (Finch, 1977). However, it is most difficult

to identify the proper educational strategies for creative people.

Teaching a skill requires technical knowledge, but students frequently reject the technical as being inhuman and alien to their unique creative needs. The techniques of reading may indeed be rejected by creative students. It takes a resourceful person to teach reading and promote creativity all at the same time.

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